

Westminster Presbyterian Church (now
Trinity Methodist Church)
273 Meeting and Society Streets
Charleston
Charleston County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-292

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181-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. SC-292

WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
(NOW TRINITY METHODIST CHURCH)HABS
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Address: 273 Meeting and Society Streets, Charleston,
Charleston County, South Carolina.

Present Owner
and Occupant: Trinity Methodist Church Congregation.

Present Use: Religious.

Brief Statement
of Significance: A mid-19th century religious building of notable
architectural character.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Westminster Presbyterian Church Congregation. Purchased in 1926 by Trinity Methodist Church Congregation [inscriptions carved on stone, set into the portico].
2. Date of erection: 1848-50.
3. Architect: Edward C. Jones. [Ravenel, Architects of Charleston].
4. Notes on original plans and construction: The following is from Ravenel, Architects of Charleston. Quotation from the Courier of August 26, 1848:

"We were much gratified yesterday, by an examination of the working plans for the Presbyterian Church, proposed to be erected for the Rev. W. C. Dana's Congregation. It will be in 'Temple' form, with portico of six Corinthian columns, fronting on Meeting street, and one on each return to the Ante. The ascent to the portico will be by eleven steps--five to the first platform, and six to the 'Portico' proper. The exterior dimensions will be ninety-six feet in length, fifty-four feet in width, and fifty-six feet (including basement) in height.

"The plans and drawings are by a very promising young artist, Edward C. Jones, a native of our city. They indicate decided talent, and if faithfully carried out in the completion of the building must establish at once the reputation of

Mr. Jones, in Charleston, as an architect, entitled to patronage and respect....the edifice we are now contemplating has no false ornament about it."

5. Notes on alterations and additions: Renovated between 1926-28, and again in 1957. [History of Trinity Methodist Church, Charleston, S. C., pamphlet]. Albert Simons, FAIA, Charleston, S. C., believes that these renovations were substantially repairs and refinishing, without major alterations.
The two west windows were closed in, in 1957.
The main-floor benches and communion rail are not original; they probably were installed 1926-28.
6. Source of information: Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, Architects of Charleston (Charleston: Carolina Art Association, 1945), pp. 201-04.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: A church in the form of a Roman Temple, nearly identical in size with the Maison Carrée at Nîmes, with rich interior wood and plaster decoration combining Greek and Roman elements.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions, number of stories, form: 57'-11 1/2" x 96'-6 1/2"; one story, with interior galleries; rectangular temple form, on podium, with front portico and steps.
2. Foundations: Stucco on brick.
3. Wall construction: marked off in 16" courses, molded water table. Painted white. Three 9" longitudinal brick walls support floor.
4. Portico (on east): Hexastyle--plus full column and responding pilaster at ends. Roman Corinthian (caps of Castor-Pollux type). Fluted columns; stucco over brick, wooden capitals, bases without plinth. Entablature is wider than normal. Cornice has dentils and foliated modillions. Pediment with plain tympanum. Ceiling has plain coffers, except large central panel which contains a complex plaster rosette of smooth leaves. Floor is

of modern terrazzo. Steps are in two flights of six risers (inner) and five risers (outer) respectively, separated by a landing of sandstone. Treads have nosing. Small modern iron railing; cast-iron light posts.

5. The entrance doorway is the only opening in the east wall; it is on center. It has wide wooden architrave trim, above which at the head are moldings and a Corinthian cornice similar to the main one but smaller. There are consoles with acanthus leaves.

The upper third of the door is fixed, with two panels side by side; the lower portion is divided, each half sliding into pockets in the wall. In each is a single panel bordered by carved egg-and-dart and bead-and-reel moldings. Inside this are corner rosettes and two vertical panels separated by a carved swag; they are bordered by a row of acanthus leaves turned inward, then a small leaf-and-tongue molding. The corners of these smaller panels are cut off, making a polygonal ending at the top and bottom. The inside of these panels is raised, and subdivided into smaller plain panels.

The fixed portion above the sliding doors has panels similar to the upper half of the doors.

The material appears to be varnished cypress, it is somewhat weathered, but in otherwise good condition. There is a recessed circular brass escutcheon with knob on each half.

These doors are undoubtedly original, and resemble those of the nearly contemporary Beth-Elohim Synagogue on Hasell Street, nearby in Charleston.

6. Windows: Triple-hung sash twelve-over-twelve lights. Architrave trim, with narrow frieze and cornice above. Triple-hung interior louvered blinds. (Windows run through balconies).
7. Roof: Gable; sheet metal covering. Entablature of order on portico continues as building cornice, but with returns at the west end, so that only a raking cornice surmounts that end. One can see star-shaped iron washers in the frieze, installed with tie rods after the earthquake of 1886.
8. Miscellaneous: Small vertical vent slits in basement walls.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plan: Rectangular auditorium, with small semi-circular chancel at west end, galleries around the other three sides. A narrow vestibule under part of east gallery, with stair at each end. Seating by open pews (benches), 15 rows; center aisle and aisle at each wall. Raised platform in front of chancel, pulpit on center; in front of platform is a small area enclosed by a Communion rail.
2. Flooring: Modern, narrow, (1928?), oak boards over old yellow pine; 3" x 12" joists, 17" on center. Chancel platform floored with old yellow pine, varying in width 4" - 6", varnished; gallery similar yellow pine 4" - 6" painted.
3. Wall finish: Plaster, painted light neutral blue.
4. Ceiling finish: A large cove springs from the interior cornice; the large white panel of the ceiling proper is enclosed by a wide series of plaster (or wood and plaster) bands--plain flat band at outer edge, row of large acanthus leaves with a narrow conventionalized palm tree in each space between leaves, plain flat band, series of simple moldings, and a band containing small paterae. At each corner of this panel is a complex foliated honeysuckle motif symmetrical about the diagonal axis. A plaster centerpiece consisting of a large heavy Greek Cross, whose ends widen to a broad point, superposed on a circle of slight relief. Near the outer rim of the circle is a flat egg-and-dart band, with small orthodox egg-and-dart moldings on each side of it. Four panels, between arms of the cross, contain (each) a symmetrical foliated motif. The cross, which projects considerably, has a "cornice" with a vine motif near the top. At the center is a pendant with smooth leaves, surrounded by a laurel wreath. The soffit of each arm contains a conventionalized palm tree, with a helical scroll bound around the trunks. The ceiling under the galleries is plain (painted plaster), inclined.
5. Doors: Paneled and glazed doors just inside the main sliding doors are probably later additions. Central double doors (from vestibule to auditorium); each has 55 small glazed panels. At the intersection of stiles and rails are rosettes of cast composition, painted (perhaps of the late 19th c.). Two smaller glazed doors between vestibule and auditorium. A four-paneled door at stair landings, each end of vestibule.

6. Trim: No trim around window and door openings. High molded, wooden base. Slightly above each window opening is a horizontal cornice. The auditorium entablature is of Roman Corinthian type; frieze and architrave of plaster; cornice with dentils and foliated modillions of wood. Off-white in color.
7. Ordonnance of Galleries: Galleries are supported on 14 wooden Roman Corinthian columns (caps of Temple of Castor-Pollux type), surmounted by a gray entablature with dentils and foliated modillions in the cornice. Above this is a white paneled attic course (railing) whose pedestals bear three deep flutes on the front face. The east gallery, whose floor has been raised above that of the others, has an additional open rail of wood, whose end pedestals are ornamented with a Lyre-motif. At the center of this rail is a large block with foliated cornice, foliated consoles at either side, and a cross-setted center panel inside which is a lyre with symmetrical foliage. Below this is a fluted pedestal bearing a laurel wreath in the center, connected to the consoles by laurel swags. (The railings appear to be old additions: French Neo-Grecian style?)
8. Seating: Benches in the north and south galleries appear original; the ends have a single panel, above which is a small cornice with bead-and-reel and smooth acanthus leaves. There are three rows in each gallery. Benches in main floor appear to be early 20th century.
9. Chancel: This is in the form of an apse flanked by coupled Roman Corinthian columns on a podium. At each side was a window, walled up in 1957. In the apse, below the impost, is a central plaster panel with foliated border recalling the scheme of the ceiling panel. At either side is a small doorway, over which is a panel containing a plaster relief--crossed leafy twigs over which is a scroll. Each panel in the apse has moldings at the border--egg and dart, leaf and tongue, bead and reel. The small doorways have plaster trim--architrave, cornice with acroteria. The upper part of each wooden door has a large (Greek) palmette grille, below which is a small horizontal panel and two vertical panels containing a lattice grille with rosettes. The plaster impost is molded, in the form of a cornice over a cove containing a row of acanthus leaves. The key block is in the form of a console richly foliated, crowned by a shell motif on the face. The architrave molding contains a row of small acanthus leaves. The hemi-dome of the apse is divided into 15 upright sectors, containing ornamental plaster reliefs--rosettes alternating with vines; at

the top are smooth leaves radiating from a (half-) laurel wreath. (The apse is formed in frame and wood lath, within a rectangular brick wall.)

10. Organ case: This is a relatively modern addition. It is of wood, rectangular, treated with a pilastered Roman Corinthian order on a high modified pedestal. Painted white.
 11. Hardware: Door butts, late 19th and 20th century. Box locks on chancel doors.
 12. No indication of original lighting or heating.
- D. Site: Fronts on Meeting Street (east). Formerly an interior lot but little wider than the building. In 1957 space was acquired through to Society Street to the south, and additional space toward north. Now treated as a lawn. Sections of original cast-iron fence have been preserved; they formerly stood at the sidewalk but have been moved back level with the front door. (Spear-shaped uprights, with capitals below the top rail; ornamental panels at the bottom rail have a fret-like appearance. This rests on a low stucco base. Two gates are similar, but have an additional paneled row at the bottom, with honeysuckle decoration.)
- E. Accessory Building: 1887-88 Sunday School and Chapel building added (George W. Egan, architect and builder). Two-story, stucco on brick, flat roof. This is at the west end of the Church building. 1938 two-story brick educational building, detached, to the north, at west rear of lot.

Prepared by Harley J. McKee, Architect
National Park Service
August 1963.

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